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RADIO FREE ASIA

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I support the amendment by the Senator from Arkansas regarding Radio Free Asia. The amendment is virtually identical to the text of H.R. 2232 as reported by the Committee on Foreign Relations on May 19.

As the author of the legislation which created Radio Free Asia (RFA) in 1994, I strongly support its efforts to broadcast truth and information to the people living under dictatorial rule in China and elsewhere in Asia.

RFA began broadcasts in 1996 on a shoestring budget of roughly \$10 million a year. This bill authorizes, in Fiscal Years 1998 and 1999, a significant increase in funding for Radio Free Asia, and provides additional funds for the transmission capability needed to broadcast the programming. It is consistent with the funding levels in S. 903, the State Department authorization bill approved by the Senate over a year ago.

Modeled on Radio Free Europe, this organization was conceived in order to broadcast news and information about internal events in China and the other non-democratic states of East Asia. Radio Free Asia thus acts as a 'surrogate' service, acting as a local media--making available information to the Chinese people which is otherwise unavailable because of the tight control that the dictatorship in Beijing retains on the media in China. As the State Department's Annual Human Rights report noted, the Chinese government and the Communist Party 'continue to control tightly print and broadcast media and use them to propagate the current ideological line.'

Radio Free Asia is designed to overcome these

restrictions on press freedom. The leaders of the new democracies in Eastern Europe have all testified to the importance of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty during the Cold War. No tribute has been more eloquent than that of Lech Walesa, former President of Poland, who said 'How fortunate that the Iron Curtain could not be raised so high as to block radio transmission. The truth seeped in, unseen by border guards . . . between the barbed wire. It provided impossible to stop, impossible to silence.'

Radio Free Asia is not, as some cynics have asserted, a propaganda service. Although funding by the U.S. government, it is a private corporation. Its funding is provided by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, a government entity which has considerable autonomy in its role of supervising U.S. government-sponsored broadcasting.

In short, Radio Free Asia is a legitimate news organization, staffed by legitimate journalists. Its President is Richard Richter, a former network news executive, who has insisted on the highest journalistic standards. The Vice-President for Programming, Daniel Southerland, is also an experience reporter who formerly served as the Beijing bureau chief for the Washington Post. In the short time that Radio Free Asia has been on the air, they have assembled a very talented and dedicated staff which is committed to honest journalism.

The exiling of prominent dissidents by the Beijing government has been a boon to Radio Free Asia. Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan, both recently exiled by China, have signed on to provide regular commentary. Radio Free Asia thus provides a platform for voices of democracy--a platform that is, unfortunately,

unavailable to these men inside China.

China and the other nations to which RFA broadcasts have not been thrilled with the honor. Since last year, the Chinese have attempted to jam Radio Free Asia broadcasts. And this week, the Beijing government rescinded visas it had previously issued for three RFA reporters who had sought to accompany President Clinton on his trip to China.

The decision by China to rescind the visas is deeply regrettable. Had it admitted the journalists, the Chinese government would have provided a manifest demonstration that it had turned a corner--that it is willing to open up its system to greater pluralism and scrutiny. China wants to be a great power. But Great Powers do not obstruct the flow of information into and out of the country. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that everyone has the right to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'

If China is to be a modern nation, it should adhere to this universal standard.

There is, however, some good news lurking in the decision of the Chinese government to block the visas for RFA reporters: China must be worried about the effect of RFA's broadcasts. In other words, the broadcasts are getting through--despite the efforts to jam it--and people are listening. Information is subversive of tyranny, as are western investment and exchanges, and the Communist government in China apparently recognizes that Radio Free Asia threatened its attempts to control news and information.

Mr. President, Radio Free Asia is an important instrument to advance U.S. policy of promoting democratic values in China and elsewhere in Asia. This amendment is a modest, but important, step to ensure that it has the tools to do the job.